



## Poisoning by non-edible squash: retrospective series of 353 patients from French Poison Control Centers

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CONTEXT: Among the numerous varieties of squash that exist, some are edible while other bitter-tasting ones are not fit for human consumption. Cases of confusion seem to be multiplying and are characterized by digestive problems (diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal pain).

METHODS: This is a descriptive retrospective study of cases of exposure reported to French Poison Control Centers between 1 January 2012 and 12 December 2016.

RESULTS: 353 patients were included, with 71.7% belonging to collective cases of poisoning. The male to female sex ratio was 0.75 for an average age of  $38.2 \pm 23.6$  years. The circumstances of exposure were dietary for 337 patients (95.5%). The majority of the squash consumed was purchased at a store (55.8%) but some also came from the garden (25.5%). 204 patients (57.8%) mostly presented with diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain, sometimes with the consequent dehydration, hypotension, tachycardia, headaches, or vertigo. There were no deaths or severe (Poisoning Severity Score (PSS) 3) cases, but there were 14 patients (4.0%) of moderate severity, 190 patients (53.8%) of minor severity (PSS 1), and 149 patients (42.2%) without severity (PSS 0) but among which we include the bitter taste of the squash. The average age of PSS 2 patients was significantly ( $p = .003$ ) older than that of the PSS <2 patients.

CONCLUSION: As the first consequential series in Europe, our study shows that exposure to non-edible squash is frequent. Usually benign, poisoning could be the consequence of the irritating effect of certain cucurbits, the molecules responsible for the taste and toxicity of the fruits. In terms of prevention therefore, we recommend disposing of any squash with a bitter taste.

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